

Town of Mt. Desert
Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes
December 2, 2020 @ 4:00 pm via Zoom

Members Present: Pete Cuffari, John Fehlauer, Scott McFarland, Kathy Miller, Wendell Oppewall, Lili Pew; Durlin Lunt, Matt Hart (ex officio)

Introductions

New members Pete Cuffari and Scott McFarland introduced themselves. Scott currently works in real estate and formerly was in education, including as principal of the Mount Desert elementary school for many years – two areas of concern for access to broadband. Pete has a software development and consulting firm with an office in NEH.

General Discussion

There was a general discussion of what this committee had explored and achieved in the past, with a focus on getting broadband services from Time Warner/Spectrum to the previously unserved part of the town, primarily Pretty Marsh. It was a roughly \$1 million project and the Town contributed about \$350,000. Now the question was whether the Town should build upon the Tilson plan from 2015, what do we want or need to do? Are there parts of Town still un/underserved, or with only DSL services available? Is there the need, or the will to expand to fiber for the whole town? The Tilson plan presented an expensive plan, upwards of \$10 million, and the cost scared people away.

It was noted that some towns in Maine, Alton in particular, has recently built out fiber to the premises throughout the very small and remote town. It was financed largely through grant funding and implemented by OTT, the existing phone service provider. It was noted that cable services were not already available, so this was a leap from DSL to fiber. In a town such as Mount Desert, where cable is increasingly available, the jump to fiber may not be the obvious option for many residents.

New Chair & Secretary

It was noted that at the last meeting of the Committee in August, Jeff Burnham suggested a new chair be selected. However, there were only three members present, so the selection of a new chair was not done. With six members present, Scott McFarland was nominated to become the chair, and unanimously approved. Kathy Miller was approved to be secretary.

Island Institute and VETRO FiberMap Engagement

- There was agreement that the committee should engage the services of the Island Institute to help guide a community engagement effort to determine the current needs of the community and gain support for any changes that may be considered.
- There was agreement that the committee should recommend to the Board of Selectmen that the Town accept the offer of VETRO FiberMap to be part of their first cohort of

towns in the Vetro Cares for Maine Program, taking advantage of their offer of services in GIS mapping for broadband planning.

- There was agreement that working with the other MDI towns, or beyond to Ellsworth, would be worthwhile, and that the League of Towns would be the appropriate forum to explore that option. It was noted that the towns of Mount Desert and Bar Harbor are currently considering some sort of collaboration. It was also noted that multi-town collaborations would make any future grant applications more appealing to funders, improving the chance of success.

Next Steps

- Kathy will share info from VETRO FiberMap with the committee and prepare a memo to the BOS to support joining their first cohort.
- Durlin will add this topic to the agenda for the January League of Towns meeting.
- Kathy will reach out to the Island Institute to explore a community engagement plan.
- Kathy will ask VETRO about going MDI-wide, and who from Swans Island (another cohort 1 member) is their lead person is so we can make a connection with them.

Future Meetings

The committee will set the second Thursday of each month at 4 pm for future meetings.

The next meeting will be January 14, 2021 @ 4 pm via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen W. Miller